

WASHINGTON, DC—U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) today voted in favor of the conference report on H.R. 1591, the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act of 2007.

“For the first time in more than four years, Congress is exercising its constitutional responsibilities over issues of war and peace and challenging the President's stay-the-course, open-ended military commitment to Iraq,” said DeFazio. “This bill will begin the long overdue redeployment of U.S. troops from Iraq and refocus our military and intelligence resources where they belong: on al-Qaeda and other international terrorist threats, not policing a civil war in Iraq.”

H.R. 1591 includes a number of benchmarks the Iraqi government must achieve. If the Iraqi government fails to make progress on several issues originally identified by President Bush in a January speech such as disarming sectarian militias, delivering requested security forces, and moving toward political reconciliation among Sunni, Shias and Kurds, then U.S. troops would be required to begin withdrawing on July 1, 2007.

If the President certifies that progress is being made on these issues by July 1st, then the withdrawal of U.S. troops would not be required to begin until October 1, 2007 with the goal of completing the withdrawal by March 31, 2008.

“The President has always set timelines for political developments in Iraq - for holding elections, for the drafting of the constitution - with the reasoning that timelines were necessary to get Iraqi political leaders to make the compromises necessary to move their country forward.

The same leverage should be used on the military side,” DeFazio argued.

“Being confronted with the reality of a U.S. withdrawal should force Iraqi factions to reach the political compromises necessary to move their country forward and begin to end the mindless sectarian strife,” DeFazio continued. “If not, there is no reason to prolong the U.S. involvement in Iraq if we want a stable country more than the Iraqi people and their elected leaders do.”

H.R. 1591 includes \$95.5 billion for our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, including \$3 billion to deploy the latest in mine-resistant vehicles;

More than \$5 billion to ensure returning troops and veterans receive the timely and comprehensive health care services they have earned, including improved identification and treatment of mental health problems and brain injuries;

\$2.25 billion to address long-standing gaps in aviation, border, port and transit security;

\$425 million to extend for one year payments under the Secure Rural Schools program;

\$60.4 million in disaster aid for salmon fisherman impacted by the virtual closure of salmon fishing off the coasts of Oregon and California last year; and,

\$6.9 billion to continue to assist victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

“Our troops have done all that has been asked of them in Iraq. They won the war. They defeated Saddam Hussein and his military.

There is no threat from weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

There is no reason for our troops to continue to be stuck in the middle of a civil war in Iraq in which they are under attack by two sides of the three-sided civil war.

It is time for our troops to come home with the honor they have earned.”

The bill was approved 218-208. The Senate is expected to vote on the bill Thursday. It will then be sent to the President for his signature or veto.